

Getting on the Same Page: Valuing the Journey as Much as the Destination

It is a very blizzardy Sunday morning with 12 inches of un-shoveled snow outside our home. I am drinking coffee, doing a sudoku puzzle, and thinking about how our very tightly planned day has just become unraveled by the weather. I like the thought because it is like having a clean white-board. We get to script the day all over again.

I am in this semi-dreamy state when my husband arrives in the kitchen with unbounded energy, having just read his emails. It is 8:30 and he is brainstorming out loud about the next steps for getting his business idea funded. Great passion, excellent ideas... wrong moment. Still, I join in the session (it is the best of my options), and then I say, very spontaneously, "I think you are one of those people who is going to have your homerun in the 7th or 8th inning." By this I mean his idea will hit pay dirt, but not as early as he would have liked. This has many repercussions, not the least of which is that he has to live with the angst that would have been erased by an early-inning score. Still, my genuine confidence in him warrants his "high-fiving" me which then allows me to retreat back into my dreamy state as I reconfigure the day.

It occurs to me that I am surrounded by goal-driven people whose energy and passion make their lives (and mine) one bumpy roller-coaster ride. If you have the stomach for it, life can be great and wildly exciting. The thought that comes to me on this Sunday morning, is that there is a trick to enjoying the ride: *We have to find as much value in the journey as we do in the destination.* Anyone who has ever worked in an intense team project with a scary deadline looming, knows that the team dynamics and challenges overcome are usually more fun than the moment of victory itself. The flip side, that feeling of a "hollow victory", usually results from some flaw in how we got there – like the politician who betrayed his best friend or reneged on some core values to earn reelection.

Most people I know would benefit from focusing more on the journey. There is my husband whose persistence and smarts will overcome the obstacles, though he has gone gray quickly ("distinguished" I tell him) and deprived himself of some occasional

laughs along the way. My “fire in the belly” middle child is the most natural competitor in my family. Winning is her destination that makes almost everything else pale in comparison. Still, she is sensitive and thoughtful and can be cajoled into counting other pleasures along the way – the swim practices enjoyed, phone calls from her 4 year old cousin, dinners with her local cousins where the bonds and short-hand conversations go way deep. The journey is rich but reminders are needed to heed the pleasures.

Even in our results-oriented, “what have you done for me lately” culture, smart business people know that the journey counts as much as the destination. How else could it be that in the words of a close colleague whose husband was a successful entrepreneur turned venture capitalist, “In California we value the entrepreneurs who failed about as much as we value the ones who succeeded.” The failure is considered a badge of character that lays the ground work for subsequent success. Things were learned that will later be applied.

The value of lessons learned, of the journey itself, is true in all walks of life. One of baseball’s most respected managers, Joe Torre of the New York Yankees, was fired from the St. Louis Cardinals before going to New York where he has coached his team through ten consecutive play-off seasons and 4 World Series rings. By all accounts, he is one of the most likable and respected professionals in baseball today, less for his strategic skills, though they are ample, than for his character. Perhaps his journey wizened him. Perhaps the process, with its ups and downs, help defined Torre and sweetened his victories.

And what of those who never had their victory? What solace or wisdom can be taken from the unfinished journey? There is very little I remember about the day of my father’s funeral except for the Rabbi’s eulogy. My father was an intelligent and gifted man who, as a devoted son, helped his family survive the depression and never had the opportunity to go to college. When he later married, he and my mother supported their family of 6 children with a corner kosher grocery store which was just enough of a business to support a very modest life. Each day, each month was a financial trial, but

our family pulled together to make it all work. We enjoyed life and its simple pleasures, and as we later went to college and graduate school, we would all remember the experiences of a family-run business. The grocery store was always with us.

Back to the eulogy, the Rabbi alluded to my father's challenging life. Until the end, my dad worked hard, long days, always worrying about the future. If the story ended there, it would be sad indeed. But, as the Rabbi pointed out, his journey was a rich one – one of family, and of community and of values deeply held. “He was like Moses,” the Rabbi offered. “He never reached the Promised Land, but his years in the desert were what counted.”

So that was my musing on this snowy Sunday morning. Redefining our success in terms of the journey, rather than the destination; realizing that the process is what lays the groundwork for what success we experience. We can test our ability to do this by looking at a moment that felt like failure and reframing that experience by asking, “*What did I learn and how did I grow?*” Answering this question may allow us to count our days and value our journey in a very different way.